

Mate Night

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Changeling Press



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Every thirty to forty years a fertile buck is born to each of the three Capriethe tribes. Revered by their kind, these males, called Billietri, are the fathers of their people. After mating with each other, they release a chemical that increases their sex drive and allows them to impregnate dozens of does during an annual ritual -- Mate Night.

Twenty-nine years ago, enemies of the Capriethe sought to destroy them by killing the next generation of Billietri. To avoid this, the young bucks -- Caesar, Alexander and Ramesses -- were separated and hidden in the far corners of the galaxy. Now the war is over and the Billietri must return home to mate for life and father the next generation of Capriethe.

Caesar and Alexander long to fulfill their duty, but in spite of the trio's scorching passion for each other, Ramesses has other plans. His destined mates must convince him to take his rightful place among the Billietri before time runs out for their species.

Chapter One

Let it be known that every thirty to forty years a fertile buck will be born to each of the three Capriethe tribes. These three honored males shall be called the Billietri and reside in the temple of the Horned God. Their past generations of Billietri will nurture and train the new bucks to take their place as fathers of the Capriethe. At the time of rut, when adorned by great horns, scented with musk, and stimulated by mutual love, the Billietri will impregnate does selected from their tribes. They will father the tribes' children each year until the next generation of Billietri reach adulthood. From the first it has been and shall it be until the last.

Caesar glanced at the words written in the front of the sacred book of the Horned God. His guardian, Napoleon, had given him the book, on his fifth birthday. Each day Napoleon had incorporated lessons from the book until Caesar could recite them by heart. The book told of the history of his people and the importance of the Billietri. Though many male Capriethe existed, all but the Billietri were sterile. Caesar well understood his responsibility as one of the fathers of his people and he had spent his life waiting for the day to prove himself worthy of the honor.

Not that he had ever seen his people, other than Napoleon, or his homeland on Deerworld Six. The year he was born, a war had broken out between the Capriethe and their enemies, the Elken. Elken spies had tried to annihilate the Capriethe by killing off the young Billietri. Caesar and the other two Billietri, Alexander and Ramesses, were taken by their guardians and hidden in separate corners of the Galaxy. That had been twenty-nine years ago. If Caesar and the other Billietri didn't return home soon and begin fathering the next generation of Capriethe, their kind might still die out.

Napoleon had kept in touch with their people and would be alerted as soon as it was safe for them to return home, but at times Caesar thought that day would never

come. Though his guardian trained him in the art of combat, he made it clear that Caesar's desire to return home and fight for the Capriethe was admirable, but irresponsible. Without the Billietri, their kind would become extinct.

Of late Napoleon had become as anxious as Caesar regarding the state of their people. Tonight they had finally received word that the war had ended. With a new treaty between the Capriethe and the Elken, it was time for the Billietri to return home and perform their sacred duty.

Excitement coiled in Caesar's gut at the thought of finally meeting the men who would be his mates for life, while at the same time he would miss the planet Amazurn, where he and Napoleon had been given sanctuary. Caesar had spent his life in a cottage deep in a beautiful, green Amazurnian valley. There Napoleon had educated him and taught him to appreciate not only the history and culture of his people, but of Amazurn as well.

"You were made for temple life," Napoleon had often told him. "You're calm, compassionate, appreciate nature but have courage and the strength to defend yourself and those around you. You will father strong offspring and offer a future filled with hope to the Capriethe. I pray that my mates have had the same good luck with Alexander and Ramesses."

Sadly, they had recently learned that Ramesses' guardian, Vladimir, had died years ago. This came as a tremendous blow to Napoleon who had loved both his mates dearly. Still, he looked forward to being reunited with his other mate when he and Alexander arrived on Amazurn in the morning. Together, Caesar and Alexander planned to track down Ramesses who had apparently been chasing around the galaxy in a souped-up transport ship, earning his living doing the gods knew what.

Caesar sighed deeply, closed the sacred book and stroked his long, silky, wheat-colored goatee. Standing on the edge of the moonlit lake behind his cottage, he gazed at the dark water and wondered what his mates would be like. Many nights he'd imagined making love with them, had pictured in his mind what they must look like. Alexander and Ramesses had an advantage since they were older than him and at least

had memories of what they looked like as children. Caesar didn't even have that, and he'd never seen holographic pics of the other Billietri.

Even though he needed rest before they began their search for Ramesses, he knew he'd have trouble sleeping tonight. He was far too excited.

* * *

Alexander circled above Amazurn, waiting for the signal to land in one of the smallest docks on the planet on the outskirts of Pear Valley. All his life he'd been taught to control his emotions, to absorb all the knowledge he could from the world around him and use it to his advantage. His guardian, Khan, was a serious student of the fighting arts. Alexander knew his one great regret in life was that he had been forced to leave the Capriethe in the midst of war. He believed that all bucks, especially the Billietri, should be warriors. His teachings about the Horned God and the responsibilities of the Billietri had included intense military study and physical training.

"Never again will the Billietri desert their people, no matter what the reason," Khan had often told Alexander.

When they returned to Deerworld Six, Alexander intended to see that the new generation of bucks, in particular the Billietri, would learn to fight with the spirit of the Horned God himself. It was the stubborn will of their people that had kept them alive while sharing a world with the likes of the Elken.

After what the Capriethe had endured these past decades while the Billietri remained in safe hiding, it shamed him to face his people. He would have to do much to earn their respect.

The first step was to reunite with his mates, Caesar and Ramesses.

"What is taking them so damn long?" Kahn grumbled from the co-pilot seat. The muscular, gray-haired buck balled his thick fist and slammed it on the control shield.

Alexander glanced at his guardian from the corner of his eye. "What happened to all your lessons in patience?"

Khan muttered something under his breath but fell silent. Never had Alexander seen him so emotional, except for when they had learned of the death of Ramesses'

guardian. Losing one of his mates, though they had been separated for years, was difficult for Khan, and Alexander knew how much he longed to reunite with Napoleon. It was understandable. The last generation of Billietri had experienced a closeness that Alexander hoped to share with his mates. He had been only four years old when they had left the Capriethe, but he vaguely remembered Caesar as a squalling infant and Ramesses, a serious boy of ten.

He still carried an old holographic pic of the three of them together, taken shortly before they'd been separated, each traveling under the guardianship of one of the last generation of Billietri. In the pic, they sat in the great room of the Horned God's temple. Ramesses, a slender boy with vibrant blue eyes and hair that was almost black, held the blond infant, Caesar. Alexander, his hair a slightly lighter shade of red than it was now, stood by Ramesses' knee.

What kind of men had Caesar and Ramesses become? Very soon he would know at least one of his mates.

The landing signal lit up the monitor in front of him and Alexander's stomach tightened with anticipation. He controlled the smile that tugged at his lips.

Moments later, they landed and passed inspection from the Amazurnian guards posted at the dock. Heading toward the small brick station, they caught sight of two men approaching them. Even if they hadn't been smiling and waving profusely, Alexander would have recognized Caesar and Napoleon by the pair of large, curved horns located high on their foreheads. The horns were characteristic of Capriethe males. Though it wasn't quite mating season yet, their horns grew throughout the year, reaching their full, magnificent proportions during rut. Alexander's own horns had become thicker and heavier of late -- a formidable weapon in hand-to-hand combat. In the ancient days, Capriethe males used their horns to duel for females. At one time even the Billietri had to fight for the choicest women to mother future generations.

Now things were more civilized. Females clamored to join the Billietri on Mate Night.

"Khan!" beamed Napoleon, a tall buck with salt and pepper hair and a long gray beard that matched Khan's.

The older males embraced tightly and Khan covered his mate's lips with a kiss so passionate Alexander shifted uncomfortably where he stood. He wasn't accustomed to displays of emotion from his guardian. Obviously his love for Napoleon knew no bounds.

While the elder Billietri greeted each other, Alexander and Caesar stared at one another for a moment before shaking hands. Caesar had grown into a handsome man with chiseled features and pale gray, almond-shaped eyes. His long, blond goatee looked silky instead of wiry like Alexander's. The urge to touch it to see if it was soft as it looked almost overcame him.

"Alexander, I've looked forward to meeting you," Caesar said with a pleasant smile. His voice was deep yet soft. The kind of voice you could listen to for hours on end without getting tired of it.

"It's good to see you again, Caesar," he replied. "I've... wondered about you and Ramesses."

"Ah. Ramesses." Caesar's smile faded. "From what we've learned, tracking him down won't be easy."

"Khan and I have connections on Space Station Beta who have confirmed his presence there as of this morning."

"Then we should leave right away," Caesar said.

"I agree," Napoleon said, still standing close enough to Khan that their shoulders touched. "While Caesar and I pack what we need for travel, both of you come to our home for a meal and some rest. You've had a long flight."

As the men headed for the shuttle to the valley, Alexander glanced at Caesar from the corner of his eye. The blond buck was slim, graceful, and carried himself like the classic martial arts masters Khan had made Alexander study under. Alexander himself had never managed to achieve a flowing fighting style. When he fought it was with short, powerful movements -- not pretty but with military precision.

Caesar piqued his interest. It seemed he had lived a much different life than Alexander. He wondered what philosophy he studied, what Napoleon had taught him about the requirements of the Billietri and how the future of the Capriethe should be molded. Something told him Caesar had vastly different beliefs than Alexander.

* * *

On the ship, Napoleon and Khan took the controls, giving Caesar and Alexander time alone in the passenger hold. After several moments of awkward silence during which they studied each other with discerning gazes, they fell into conversation.

Alexander found himself greatly attracted to Caesar. In spite of his chiseled face, pale coloring and graceful carriage, Caesar had an underlying strength and confidence that was undeniably sexy. He spoke quietly, his expression serene yet his gray eyes glimmered with vitality. The shape of his full pink lips peeking through his silky beard tempted Alexander to kiss them.

Still, it was probably too soon to make sexual overtures. Alexander was more than ready, but perhaps Caesar would need more time. He might be the sort who enjoyed a "getting to know you" period before hitting the sheets.

Not that they would have much time for a long courtship. Mate Night was mere days away. They needed to find Ramesses and return to the temple in time to impregnate the selected does.

"You spent your whole life on Amazurn?" Alexander asked.

"Sometimes we traveled, but Pear Valley was our home base. It was a beautiful place to learn and train."

"Napoleon taught you to fight, then?"

"Of course. It's important for the Billietri to know how to defend themselves and the philosophy behind martial arts is an excellent guideline for spiritual leadership."

"In the beginning the Billietri were military leaders," Alexander stated. "When we return, we must see to it that future generations of Billietri understand that. We will never again run from battle."

"I agree, however, protecting our race is our priority."

“What kind of men flee danger?” Alexander couldn’t keep the disgust from his voice. “The Capriethe should be able to look to us for leadership.”

“We and our guardians could have remained behind. We could have fought and died and with us our entire race,” Caesar replied in his soft, steady voice.

Anger coiled in Alexander’s belly. “I will not sire a race of cowards.”

“Neither did our predecessors. If they had, we wouldn’t have a home to go back to. The Capriethe have been through difficult times. They need unified Billietri, not a trio who constantly quarrels amongst themselves.”

Pausing a moment, Alexander held Caesar’s gaze. The younger man was proving rather stubborn, yet sensible. “I agree. We’ll have a lot to talk about once we find Ramesses. I think it’s safe to say we both have the Capriethe’s best interests at heart.”

“Without doubt.” Caesar nodded. “And I also hope we’ll take pleasure in each other. Napoleon spoke often of his mates and the closeness they shared. I would like something similar for us.”

That was a relief. Alexander knew he’d be spending the rest of his life with Caesar and Ramesses, and he wanted to get along with them.

Though he and Caesar seemed to have conflicting personalities, he found himself liking the blond. He seemed honest and with each passing moment became more and more appealing. The strong aroma of his musk filled Alexander with every breath -- so delicious and sexy that he needed to keep a tight rein on his passion.

“Where did you and Khan settle?” Caesar asked, redirecting the conversation.

“We didn’t. Khan had many connections to warriors all over the galaxy, different species with varied fighting techniques. He made sure I studied with them all.”

The slightest smile touched Caesar’s lips. “Interesting. I look forward to training with you. Actually, I have a favorite technique we could try now, if you’re up to it?”

“I’m game.” Alexander stood and Caesar joined him, leading the way to the center of the hold.

Though not a large ship, it was spacious enough for light training. He and Khan had often passed the time practicing while docked between destinations.

“This method is emotional as well as physical,” Caesar explained, shifting into a high stance, his feet shoulder width apart, his right foot forward, the knee slightly bent. He held out his forearm and motioned for Alexander to do the same. The backs of their wrists touched and a jolt of desire shot through Alexander. He hadn’t realized just how much he’d wanted to touch the blond.

Caesar continued, “Perhaps you’re familiar with this technique? It was developed by the ancient martial artists of Vampirema. Close your eyes and sense what I’m about to do by the connection we share.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Alexander let his eyes slip shut. He was familiar with this method, though it wasn’t one he enjoyed. To him, fighting should be cold, hard and done with his eyes wide open.

They began moving in gentle, swaying motions, sometimes following each other’s moves, other times countering them. Several times they tried to sweep each other’s feet or throw each other off balance, but they almost seemed to read each other’s minds.

Alexander had never felt so closely linked to another person. Maybe it was the legendary connection of the Billietri, but he knew in his heart no matter what their beliefs or the different lives they had led up until that moment, he and Caesar belonged together. Would it be the same when they met Ramesses?

Those few seconds of allowing his thoughts to drift proved to be Alexander’s downfall. The room spun and he crashed on to his back, Caesar atop him, pinning him in a grapple hold.

His eyes flew open and he fought back. He excelled in grappling and soon reversed their position, pinning the blond to the ground. Alexander’s muscles strained as he held Caesar. In spite of his slender appearance, the blond was shockingly strong.

Their gazes locked and Caesar moistened his lips, his eyes alive with excitement, whether from the fight or from the passion burning between them Alexander wasn’t sure.

Caesar answered the unasked question when he said, “Lean closer.”

“What?” Alexander licked his lip.

“Closer.”

As if entranced, he leaned nearer to Caesar so their lips almost touched. The blond lifted his head and covered Alexander’s mouth with a kiss so deep and sweet his head spun.

He loosened his hold on Caesar and loomed above him, a hand braced on either side of his head as he pressed him closer to the floor, deepening the kiss. Gods, he tasted even more delicious than he’d imagined. Their hot, wet tongues mingled, stroking each other, teasing and exploring. Caesar’s long, sinewy legs wrapped around Alexander’s waist and held him firmly. The blond clutched handfuls of Alexander’s hair, holding him closer as their kiss became more demanding.

Alexander took his lower lip between his teeth and tugged on it, sucking and licking until a moan of raw need escaped Caesar’s throat. Their cocks, rock hard and throbbing, pressed between their bodies and all Alexander could think about was thrusting into Caesar’s tight ass.

By the way Caesar practically growled with passion, ran his hands down Alexander’s back and grasped his bottom, he must have felt the same. Thrills of pure excitement coursed through him as Caesar squeezed and kneaded his ass. Their horns made clicking sounds as they touched and locked.

Their mouths parted and Alexander spoke breathlessly against Caesar’s lips. “Fuck, I want you. I know this is crazy. We just met --”

“But we’re the Billietri. We were born for each other.”

“I know.” Their gazes met and Alexander’s brow furrowed. “I’ve always known that but until this moment I don’t think I truly believed.”

“Believe,” Caesar said in a husky whisper. He grasped Alexander’s bulging crotch and kneaded until the redhead closed his eyes and moaned softly.

Reaching down, Alexander brushed Caesar’s hand away only to pull down his trousers. His eyes opened halfway and his pulse raced as Caesar knelt in front of Alexander, grasped his cock and took the bulging head between his lips.

Alexander's eyes opened fully, only because he couldn't resist staring at the gorgeous blond's full lips teasing his cock head. With every tug of Caesar's mouth and sweep of his hot, wet tongue, Alexander's heart beat harder. His breathing quickened and little tremors of delight coursed down his spine.

The cockpit door opened and Napoleon cleared his throat loudly.

Caesar leapt to his feet, running his sleeve across his lips while Alexander struggled to hitch up his trousers. Difficult with an erection as hard as a steel pole.

They exchanged glances and Alexander's face felt as hot as the blush-stained ridges of Caesar's cheekbones looked.

"Excuse me," Napoleon said.

"Yes?" Alexander grunted, covering his embarrassment with roughness.

"We'll be landing on Space Station Beta soon," Napoleon told him. "When we do, Khan and I will be leaving right away for home. A shuttle will be waiting for us."

"What do you mean?" Caesar asked. "We haven't gotten Ramesses yet."

"That task is for you and Alexander," Napoleon said, his gaze switching between both men. "You're the Billietri. It's best for you to stand together now. Khan and I would only be an interference. You've been trained and prepared. You're ready to face life as a trio."

"That's true of us," Alexander said. "But Ramesses has been without a guardian for years. What if he's not ready?"

"Then it's your job to make him ready," Napoleon said. "Remember, Ramesses is older than the two of you. We had been preparing him in the temple long before you were separated, and he did have several years with Vladimir before his death. Ramesses was a swift learner and a strong boy. He won't disappoint us."

"I hope none of us disappoint you," Caesar said.

"You won't." Napoleon grasped his shoulders and held his gaze. "Khan and I will prepare the temple for your return. Remember, it's important for you to be there in time for Mate Night. The does will be waiting and it has been twenty-nine years since any kids have been born to the Capriethe."

Great, Alexander thought, talk about performance anxiety.

“We’ll be there,” he said with confidence.

Napoleon returned to the cockpit, closing the door behind him. Caesar and Alexander turned to each other, many silent questions passing between them. Questions that would only be answered when their paths finally crossed Ramesses’.

Chapter Two

Ramesses stepped into The Purple Asteroid bar and strode toward a table in the darkest corner of the place. His keen gaze took in everything, from the gang of tough-looking Taurothish pilots at the bar to the small and seedy Lushithians cheating at poker at the table by the back exit.

He ignored lustful looks from a variety of females. It seemed women, no matter what their species, found Capriethe males in rut irresistible. It was the scent. Strong yet delectable. At least that's what an Amazurian trader he'd once bedded had told him.

At the moment the idea of some fast, hard, mind-numbing sex appealed to him, but he couldn't indulge himself now. He'd been on the run for the past few months and knew the Jodyian slavers who were after him could show up at any moment. He'd stopped at Space Station Beta to tie up some business. Soon he'd be leaving the galaxy. Maybe he'd head for the Tyarra-Set galaxy. There were several planets there with an atmosphere toxic to Jodyians.

He sat at the table, ordered a drink of imported Butterscotch Whiskey, leaned back in his chair and sighed. Then two men entered the bar and sent his pulse racing out of control.

A lean blond and a tall, sturdy redhead, both with long goatees and horns as thick and curved as Ramesses' own. By the gods, it had been years since he'd seen another of his own kind and these weren't just any Capriethe bucks. Though it had been decades since they'd seen each other, he would know them anywhere. The Billietri.

* * *

Almost as soon as Alexander walked into the bar his gaze riveted to the dark-haired Capriethe male seated across the room. Even in the dimness his huge, vivid blue eyes seemed to glow with vitality.

Though Alexander and Ramesses had been mere children when they'd last met, he would recognize the eyes of the eldest Billietri anywhere.

He noted Ramesses had an impressive set of horns poking through his thick, almost black hair, but he had forsaken the traditional Capriethe goatee, leaving his square jaw line smooth. He had a rather large nose that only added to his masculine charm.

Ramesses noticed Alexander and Caesar as well. By the look on his face he was shocked to see them. As well he should be. After all, it had been years since he'd had any contact with others of his kind.

Glancing to his right, Alexander met Caesar's gaze. The blond nodded slightly and they approached Ramesses' table. The scent of the eldest Billietri hung heavily on the air, mingling with that of his younger mates. The females in the bar had their attention fixed on the three Capriethe males. Alexander would have preferred privacy for this first meeting with Ramesses, but at the moment little could be done about it.

When they reached the table, Ramesses studied them with an aloofness that might have intimidated lesser men. Caesar, his hands folded in front of him, gazed at him calmly while Alexander leveled his steeliest look upon him.

Up close, Ramesses was even more attractive. The lines by his eyes and the slender scar across his left cheek only added to his rugged good looks, making him seem real and touchable in spite of his attitude.

Caesar was the first to speak. "Ramesses?"

The dark-haired buck took so long to reply that Alexander thought it was his intention to ignore them. His anger rose. What was his problem?

"Let me guess," Ramesses said in a choppy, street accent completely unbecoming of Billietri, "Caesar and Alexander. Glad to see you're still alive."

"May we sit?" Caesar asked.

Without waiting for Ramesses' reply, Alexander kicked out a chair and dropped into it. "We haven't much time so let's cut to the chase. Mate Night is almost here and we need to return to the Capriethe."

"Do we?" Ramesses said with a hint of sarcasm that really got under Alexander's skin. As much as he liked Caesar he was beginning to dislike Ramesses. Funny, because when they were children he'd always looked up to him. Even worse, in spite of his dislike he found himself undeniably attracted to the bastard. His scent, the spirited expression in his eyes and his sinewy, broad-shouldered frame were sexier than Alexander wanted to admit.

"Listen, I don't know what your problem is, but sort it out later. We have a duty to fulfill and --"

"Duty? It's been almost thirty years since we set foot on Deerworld Six. I have a life."

Alexander snorted. "Some life. The rumors I've heard about you would make Vladimir turn over in his grave."

"If you want to keep your pretty face, never mention Vladimir again," Ramesses said in a quiet yet furious tone.

Alexander opened his mouth to retort, but Caesar stopped him with a firm hand on his shoulder. He glanced at the blond who shook his head slightly.

"We realize your life must have been difficult after what happened to your guardian," Caesar said. "However, your very existence proves he taught you well. We have a responsibility that must be fulfilled. Our people are depending upon us."

"You might call them your people, but they're not mine," Ramesses stated.

"You are Billietri!" Alexander snapped. This was proving much more difficult than he'd imagined. Ramesses knew all about his duty. There should be no problem. The Billietri required a life of order and discipline.

Several patrons stared in their direction.

"We should continue this conversation in private," Caesar said. "Ramesses, would you accompany us outside please?"

He glanced at them warily and Alexander said, "You at least owe us that much."

"I don't owe you anything," Ramesses said.

"Then out of respect to Vladimir, at least come with us and talk for a while," Caesar suggested.

Ramesses sighed and glanced past them. Finally he stood. "All right. But make it quick."

They left the bar and walked to the docking bay, a three-sided enclosure with a smooth gray floor and walls imprinted with grids. Many vessels, from heavy cargo ships to sleek racers, were docked there, but all the patrons must have been at the bar since they were the only three living creatures there. They paused by their ship.

"You really have no intention of returning home?" Alexander demanded. He and Ramesses fixed steely gazes on each other, neither willing to budge an inch.

"My home is open space."

"Oh man." Alexander raised his eyes to the heavens. "Just what we need. A brooding space cowboy. What the hell is your problem? We are the fathers of our people. We're meant to procreate, to guide and --"

"Offer our very souls to the Capriethe. Yeah, yeah, yeah," Ramesses scoffed. "I have one of the little sacred books, too. I probably had it memorized before you were even born, kid. And I've been around long enough to know it's bullshit."

Alexander's jaw tightened and he resisted the urge to ball his hands into fists. Calm. He needed to remain calm and in control no matter how much he wanted to grab this guy by the horns and kick his ass.

"That's not true," Caesar said quietly. "In your heart you know it's not true."

"What makes you think I have a heart?" Ramesses glared at him, then shook his head. "Look, I appreciate that you want to go back home, but there's no point."

Caesar's brow furrowed. "No point? Without us our species will be extinct."

"Maybe they don't want to be saved."

"What do you mean?" Alexander asked.

"I mean you shouldn't be so quick to trust people you haven't seen in decades."

"Explain."

Ramesses stared at them for a long moment and Alexander sensed he was about to speak then seemed to change his mind. He shook his head. "You have no idea what my life is like and I don't want to know anything about yours. The Billietri mean nothing to me anymore."

"You're right. We don't know each other, but that doesn't change the fact that we belong together," Caesar said. "Maybe your life has been so horrible that you're able to commit genocide, but my soul is not prepared for that. I can't believe yours is either, Ramesses."

The eldest Billietri's lips twisted into what might have been a smile. Glancing at Alexander, he jerked his thumb in Caesar's direction. "Is he always this holier than thou?"

"I'd rather have him than you," Alexander stated.

"Good. Then there's no problem. The two of you can screw till your eyes cross then have your gang fuck with the does and become the fathers of the Capriethe. Have fun. See ya."

Ramesses took a step away and Alexander lost his last shred of control. His fist connected with Ramesses' face in a punch that would have knocked most men into oblivion. Ramesses staggered, his face splattered with blood. Surprise and pure rage flashed across his eyes as he dove at Alexander. They butted horns so hard that Alexander was surprised his didn't crack off.

Fuck. This guy was strong.

Again and again they rammed each other, the sound of their clashing horns echoing through the otherwise silent docking bay.

"Stop it!" Caesar shouted. "We're not supposed to be fighting each other!"

Neither Alexander nor Ramesses paid attention. They were too enflamed with battle lust. Between head butts, they attacked each other with fierce punches and kicks.

Caesar stepped between them and in a blur of fast, graceful movements sent each buck flying in the opposite direction. Alexander's back crashed into one ship while Ramesses staggered into another.

They stood, staring in surprise at the slender blond whose normally serene face now blazed with anger.

"This is pointless! Alexander, we can't force him to take his rightful place. If he wants to waste his life as a thief, smuggler or drug dealer --"

"I'm no drug dealer," Ramesses snapped, touching a hand to his bruised jaw.

"My point is it doesn't matter," Caesar said, staring hard at Ramesses. "Our guardians gave up everything to see to our safety. Vladimir even gave his life. If you want to throw their gift away, it's up to you, but I'm going home where I belong. Alexander?"

It seemed the youngest of the Billietri had the most common sense and maturity.

"I'm coming," Alexander replied. Casting Ramesses one last disgusted look, he took his place beside Caesar and they headed toward their ship.

"Hey," Ramesses called.

They paused and turned to him.

"There's a bunch of Jodyian slavers around here and they're looking for a Capriethe to add to their zoo. Watch your asses."

"They'd better watch theirs," Alexander muttered. He was just in the mood to kick the shit out of somebody. He only wished it had been Ramesses.

"Thank you for the warning," Caesar said. "If you change your mind, we'll be spending the night here. After that you can contact us on Deerworld Six at the Temple of the Horned God."

Ramesses nodded, gave a short wave and walked across the docking bay where he boarded his ship.

* * *

Ramesses dropped into the pilot seat of his ship and took off as fast as safety allowed in the small docking bay. His pulse was still racing after his encounter with the Billietri. For years he'd truly believed they no longer meant anything to him, but that was a damn lie. The moment he'd come in contact with Caesar and Alexander, an

almost uncontrollable desire welled up in him. They fulfilled physical and emotional needs he'd already denied for far too long.

Still, he couldn't allow some primitive instinct to control him as if he was an animal. Maybe it was rut. Their kind always went a little crazy during mating season. Yet that didn't explain the loneliness and the longing in his heart now that he'd finally made the decision to thrust his destined mates out of his life. Even though they had been separated, he had known one day their paths would cross. When that time came he would have to choose between freedom and responsibility. More than responsibility. His desire for Caesar and Alexander was like hunger. Yes, he could continue starving but only death could stop the gnawing need for his mates.

By letting them go without telling them everything he knew, he was most likely sending them to their death. After Vladimir was killed, he'd vowed never again to show love and loyalty to anyone. Caesar was right when he'd said Vladimir gave everything, even his life, for the Capriethe. Unfortunately not all the Capriethe placed the same high value on the continued existence of their species.

Most likely it wouldn't matter if he told Caesar and Alexander the truth. Their guardians had them so brainwashed with history and the sacred book that they'd willingly race into hell to lock horns with the devil if they thought it was their destiny.

Still, they had the right to know. As one last act of respect for his guardian and a hint of affection for the Billietri, he needed to tell them that even though the war was over, they were still in danger.

He tried several times to raise Caesar and Alexander on the communicator. Finally Alexander's voice came over, cool but clear.

"Before you two return to Deerworld Six there's something you need to know about what happened to Vladimir," Ramesses said.

"So talk," Alexander told him.

Ramesses curled his lip and balled his fist. Something about Alexander irritated the hell out of him while at the same time turning him on. He longed to grasp the redhead by his thick curly hair and shut him up with a hard kiss. Lots of tongue and

teeth. Maybe even rough enough to draw a little blood. He longed to feel Alexander's hard body against his again, only this time they'd be fighting for a more passionate goal -- such as who would win the right to fuck the other's ass.

He wanted Caesar, too, of course, but none of that rough stuff with him. Caesar was the kind of guy meant to be savored with lots of licks and kisses. He wanted to take his time stroking the blond's staff, savoring his balls and teasing his ass with tongue and cock.

Fuck. He was getting hard just thinking about it.

"Not like this," Ramesses said. "No communicators. It isn't secure enough for my taste."

"Then what?"

"Meet me on Siliconaria. I'm spending the night on the planet's southern wilderness. Do you have a lock on my ship?"

"Yes. We'll find you there."

"At midnight. I have some business before then."

They turned off their communicators and Ramesses hoped he'd made the right decision. When the Billietri met again, there was a good chance they'd make love. The desire to mate was surprisingly strong, especially now that Mate Night was almost here. Every year around this time Ramesses could scarcely think of anything but sex. A few years back he'd been caught in a smuggling ring and did some time in solitary confinement on Tauroth. He'd actually sprained his own hand trying to satisfy the overpowering Capriethe urges. Rut was a bitch when you didn't have mates available, but until now he'd never experienced need as deep as what he felt for Caesar and Alexander. Their scents still clung to his clothes and he could almost feel Alexander's warm, hard body against his.

No matter what he decided about the Billietri, tonight should at least prove... interesting.

* * *

"What do you think he wants to tell us?" Caesar asked Alexander.

"I have no idea, but I don't trust him."

"His life has been different than ours. Without Vladimir to guide him through his youth --"

"Plenty of people have little guidance but they don't choose a life of crime."

"It's not like he's a murderer."

Alexander turned his piercing green gaze to Caesar. "How do you know? He's supposed to be a father of the Capriethe and he's turned out to be an old punk. You think he would have done something with his life other than --"

"It's easy for us to judge. He was fourteen when Vladimir died and completely on his own. I think he did what he had to in order to survive."

Alexander raised his eyes to the heavens.

"You don't think so?" Caesar pressed.

"I think you're too forgiving."

"Let's hear what he has to say before we decide which of us is right."

"Maybe he was right about one thing."

"What's that?"

"Your holier than thou attitude can get on a guy's nerves."

Caesar's eyes widened a bit. "I'm only trying to look at both sides of the story. If you allow your emotions to rule, you lose sight of reality."

"Come a little closer."

"What?"

"Come."

Edging nearer, Caesar watched Alexander with curiosity. The redhead placed a hand to the back of his neck.

"What are you doing?" Caesar asked.

"Shutting you up," Alexander replied and kissed him.

Caesar closed his eyes, enjoying the sensation of Alexander's lips and the taste of his tongue that brushed his with long, tender strokes.

When they landed on Siliconaria, Caesar agreed with Alexander's plan to advance on Ramesses' ship stealthily, observing him until they felt certain it was safe to approach. Alexander seemed to be under the impression that Ramesses might be out to do them harm. Caesar didn't believe that. When he'd looked into Ramesses' eyes, he'd seen toughness and intelligence but not the evil Alexander seemed to believe consumed him. Caesar wasn't stupid enough to think Ramesses wasn't capable of wickedness and violence, but there was another side to him as well. With any luck they'd have a chance to uncover the heart of the eldest Billietri.

Chapter Three

Alexander and Caesar docked their ship in the wilderness several miles from Ramesses' vessel and approached on foot, keeping to the trees and moving almost silently. Their scanners finally picked up on Ramesses, telling them he was close by. Soon they heard the sound of running water and came upon a small cascade pouring into a pool in the clearing. The full moon brightened the clearing, reflecting on the dark water and illuminating Ramesses who stood naked beneath the cascade. With his eyes closed and face tilted up, he allowed the water to rush over him.

Both men paused behind a thick tree and stared. Caesar's heartbeat quickened and he moistened his lips that had gone dry. By the Horned God, Ramesses had a gorgeous body. Broad shoulders, muscled arms, a powerful back and chest, a lean waist and abs Caesar longed to trace with his tongue. He had a great bottom, too, large and hard-looking. The muscles in his buttocks and long, lean legs flexed as he stepped away from the cascade, wiping water from his eyes.

"Looking at him makes me eager for Mate Night," Caesar murmured.

"Now isn't the time to think with our cocks," Alexander said, though Caesar noted the lust in his eyes. A glance lower revealed an enticing bulge in the front of the redhead's snug black trousers.

Movement in the trees on the other side of the pool drew their attention. Six Jodyian slavers, hulking, sallow-skinned creatures with long greenish-blond hair and tusks on either side of their piggish noses strode into the water, surrounding Ramesses. They wore thick, silvery leather-like shirts and trousers and carried lazar pistols and shocker clubs.

Naked and vulnerable, Ramesses stood calmly, yet Caesar noted his large blue eyes keenly observing the Jodyians.

"We better help him." Caesar was about to step forward, but Alexander grasped his arm.

"Watch first."

"Those must be the Jodyians he told us about at The Purple Asteroid. He's outnumbered. We have to --"

"Shh!" Alexander snapped, nodding toward the pool.

"You didn't think you'd actually get away from us?" said one of the slavers. "All we had to do was follow your smell."

"How can you smell anything over your own stench?" Ramesses replied.

"I'm going to enjoy seeing you in the zoo," sneered another slaver. "Our boss will be happy to have his first Capriethe on display. You've given us quite a chase, goat man. I'm almost sorry to see it end."

Their shocker clubs drawn, the group attacked Ramesses simultaneously.

Caesar drew a deep breath, his muscles tense as he watched Ramesses defend himself with fists and horns. Though he fought with street style rather than with the military precision of Alexander or the grace of Caesar, Ramesses was incredibly strong and seemed to have little fear of pain. Several whacks from the shocker clubs didn't put him out of commission and he even managed to disarm two of the slavers, claiming their weapons. He swung the clubs with accuracy, defending himself with skill and attacking with a vengeance. Still he was outnumbered by creatures who possessed three times the strength of even the most athletic Capriethe.

"Now," Alexander said.

He and Caesar dove from behind the trees, using the element of surprise to their advantage. Ramesses glanced at them and together the Billietri finished off the fight, rendering all six of the Jodyians unconscious.

Caesar grasped one of the slavers and dragged him out of the water.

"What are you doing?" Ramesses asked.

His brow furrowed, Caesar said, "We can't let them drown."

"Why the hell not?"

"I tend to agree with Ramesses on this one." Alexander folded his arms across his chest.

Frustrated by their attitude, Caesar walked back into the water and grasped another unconscious slaver. "Where's the honor in letting them drown?"

"Who gives a shit about honor?" Ramesses snorted. "They're scum."

"They're scum, but *we're* not," Caesar stated. "Get over here and help me. We'll tie them up and surrender them to the authorities."

Alexander and Ramesses exchanged glances, shrugged and did as Caesar asked. They tied up the slavers in the back of Ramesses' vessel.

"This is much more civilized," Caesar said.

"Much easier," Ramesses said, taking one of the lazar pistols they'd confiscated and aiming it at a slaver.

In spite of his shock, Caesar reacted quickly, knocking the pistol from his hand. "What are you doing?"

"What you're obviously too stupid to do. If we turn them over to the authorities on this planet they'll fine them and let them go. Then they'll be back after my ass and probably yours too."

"Then we'll take them to the Capriethe authorities," Caesar said.

"You expect me to fly all the way to Deerworld Six with these pigs?" Ramesses chuckled. "You've got to be kidding. Read my lips, blondie. No way. No how."

"Told you," Alexander sighed. "He's a murderer."

"Murder and self defense are two different things," Ramesses stated.

"Then prove you know the difference." Caesar held his gaze, as if searching for some sign that Alexander wasn't right about him after all. "If you don't want to take them, we'll put them on our ship, but I'm not going to stand here and let you kill six unconscious men."

"Pigs."

"Whatever."

"Fine," Ramesses said, his jaw visibly tight. "Have it your way."

The trio left the ship and returned to the pool where they cleaned up after the fight. Caesar and Alexander stripped off their wet clothes and waded into the water.

Ramesses joined them and said gruffly, "Thanks for the help."

"You're welcome." Caesar offered him a smile.

Ramesses' lips flickered upward.

"What did you want to talk to us about?" Alexander asked, casting the dark-haired buck a wary look.

He strode toward Alexander, his face tilted up slightly to meet the taller man's gaze. Grasping Alexander's face roughly, he tugged him closer and spoke in a husky voice against his lips, "Fuck now. Talk later."

Their lips met in a crushing kiss. After a moment's hesitation, Alexander wrapped his arms around Ramesses, running his hands over his broad shoulders and muscular back.

Caesar's heart beat out of control and his cock swelled as passion overtook him. He knew they should talk first and fuck later, but his sex drive was far too strong. Rut was too close for them to deny their mutual attraction and need for release any longer. He approached his mates who broke their kiss and turned to him. Alexander and Ramesses trailed their warm, callused hands down the length of Caesar's body. Then Alexander buried a hand in his hair and kissed him while Ramesses curled a fist around his cock.

Drawing a deep breath, he willed himself to remain calm and in control, difficult with the marvelous sensations flooding his body. Caesar enjoyed savoring every moment of lovemaking, yet during rut he found it difficult to keep a rein on his passion, mostly because other species usually couldn't keep up with the Capriethe sex drive. Natives of Vampirema actually had plenty of staying power, so throughout his life he'd chosen several Vampiremite lovers, even though he wasn't especially keen on blood sharing.

This was the first time he'd be making love with his own kind and knowing they possessed the same insatiable desires added unprecedented excitement to this union.

Alexander uttered a low moan as his tongue swept Caesar's and explored his mouth slowly and thoroughly. His fingers tightened on Caesar's scalp and Caesar reached up and grasped a handful of Alexander's thick, curly hair. His other hand caressed the hard, rounded muscles of Ramesses' biceps and shoulder.

Pumping Caesar's shaft faster with one hand, Ramesses reached around with his other hand and grasped his bottom. He stroked and kneaded both ass cheeks then slid a finger between them, teasing his sphincter with gentle pressure that drove Caesar's desire off the scale.

Ramesses stepped behind Caesar and dropped to his knees. He pressed soft kisses over the blond's ass, intermittently biting it, not hard enough to break the skin but just short of painful. He licked the stinging places where he'd left teeth marks and ran his tongue over his sphincter.

With a moan of pleasure, Caesar tightened his leg muscles to keep from sinking to the ground. While Ramesses teased him from behind, Alexander knelt in front of him, clasped his cock and began licking it from root to crown. He took the head between his lips and sucked deeply, sending a shudder of raw desire through Caesar who grasped his shoulders, his fingers tight on the rock hard muscles. In spite of how he struggled to keep control, his greedy body betrayed him. He knew within seconds he'd come if his two gorgeous mates didn't let up.

He allowed them to continue licking, sucking and caressing until he stood, trembling, on the verge of climax. Then he panted, "By the Horned God, if you don't stop I'm going to --"

"Come," Ramesses said during a slight pause between licks. "Go ahead." His wet, wicked tongue plunged between Caesar's ass cheeks while Alexander continued sucking his staff with a vengeance.

"Ah!" Caesar cried, every muscle tense and his heart hammering mercilessly. His eyes closed and mind reeling, he came long and hard, spurting into Alexander's mouth. The redhead didn't stop sucking and swallowing until Caesar staggered aside and

dropped to the ground. Panting, he leaned back on his elbows and smiled. "I didn't realize how much I needed that."

"I do," Ramesses grunted, curling his fist around his stiff cock and pumping. "I've been horny for days. It's rut."

"Rut. One of my favorite words," Alexander said, his lustful gaze fixed on Ramesses. They stepped toward each other, their hands roaming over each other's shoulders and chests as they kissed deeply.

Caesar watched his handsome mates kiss and caress each other, loving the way their powerful bodies fit together. Alexander's tanned, weathered skin was a stark contrast to Ramesses' pale complexion. Their long, hair-dusted legs entwined, their hard thighs straining against each other and their thick, well-veined cocks trapped between them.

Unable to resist, Caesar stood and approached them, running his hands over their sleekly muscled backs and squeezing their hard asses. Their mingled scents aroused him even more and, as legend proclaimed, making love with his mates had increased his sex drive rather than diminished it. Already his cock was once again stiff and aching with need.

When Alexander and Ramesses parted, the redhead glanced toward Caesar and moistened his lips. "I sucked you, but I still want to fuck you."

His heart racing and thrills of desire shooting through him, Caesar walked toward a tree and braced his hands against it, his ass thrust outward for Alexander to do with as he pleased.

The redhead approached and grasped Caesar by the hips.

"Wait a minute." Ramesses gripped Alexander's biceps.

Alexander glanced at him, slightly irritated. "What?"

"At least let me moisten you up some," Ramesses said. He knelt, tugged Alexander toward him and began licking and sucking his cock. Only when the thick, straining rod was slick with saliva did he allow Alexander to pull away.

"Now me," Ramesses ordered.

Without hesitation, Alexander squatted and began sucking his cock. Ramesses wove his fingers through Alexander's thick, curly hair. His beautiful blue eyes closed halfway and he drew sips of air through parted lips as Alexander teased him with his skilled mouth.

Finally he tugged Alexander away and the redhead stood.

By then Caesar was practically trembling with anticipation. When Alexander grasped his hips and entered him slowly, filling him with his thick, wet cock, he couldn't keep from moaning.

Then he felt added pressure and heard Alexander grunt with pleasure-pain.

Glancing over his shoulder, Caesar saw Ramesses behind Alexander, filling him with his cock. It was almost like being fucked by both men at the same time. This was just too damn hot.

Alexander and Ramesses began pumping in unison. Reaching around to grasp Caesar's cock in one hand, Alexander stroked as he thrust. Collective tremors rushed through all three men.

Never in his life had Caesar been this aroused. His breath came in hard pants and he didn't even bother trying to control his desire. It was too much to ask at the moment. As Alexander pumped, Caesar felt his horns brush against the back of his head. Alexander nuzzled Caesar's neck, his goatee rough yet pleasant. The sensation of his warm breath close to his ear turned Caesar on even more.

Their grunts and moans of desire filled the clearing and the aroma of their musk was so strong Caesar felt almost dizzy with passion.

"Please," Caesar gasped. His mind reeled and every nerve in his body seemed thoroughly exposed and stimulated beyond endurance. His cock felt ready to burst and he writhed and bucked, his body following the rhythm set by his mates.

He wasn't exactly sure who came first, but an intense mutual climax seemed to spill over them.

Crying out long and loud, Caesar spurted over the tree trunk. He felt Alexander's hot juices filling him and also heard Ramesses' shout of ecstasy.

After what seemed like an endless climax that left Caesar reeling, his heart pounding in his ears, they dropped to the ground in a sweaty, tangled heap.

A moment later, Ramesses muttered, "I can't believe I'm still hard as a rock after that."

"Rut," Alexander replied, his lips brushing the back of Caesar's neck. "On Mate Night we'll be able to fuck until we can't walk anymore, but unfortunately right now we have other matters that need attention."

Caesar lifted his head and rested it on his hand as he gazed at Ramesses who lay on his stomach, his eyes closed. A calm, sated expression softened his rugged features. Caesar ran his fingertips over the back of Ramesses' neck, noting it was neither too thick nor too thin. It revealed power without unsightly bulk.

"He's right," Caesar said. "So you better tell us why you called us here before our prisoners wake up and start making a racket. I'd like to get them to the authorities before then if we can help it."

"Right." Alexander, who had been stretched out on his side, his back to them, now turned toward his companions. "I'm curious about that myself."

"It's about what happened to Vladimir. I couldn't let you return to Deerworld Six without knowing the truth," Ramesses said. He pushed himself up, resting on his elbows.

Again Alexander looked wary.

Caesar felt a prickle of apprehension creep up his spine.

"What truth?" Alexander demanded.

"Vladimir was murdered. He died protecting me." The guilt and sorrow in Ramesses' eyes was painful to see. He must have felt a great deal of love for his guardian to still be so affected after this many years. Maybe because he seemed so tough and invulnerable, but Ramesses' grief touched Caesar deeply.

"We were attacked. Outnumbered. Both of us fought and finally got the chance to run for our ship. We were nearly there when one of them fired his laser pistol. If Vladimir hadn't pushed me out of the way and taken the blow --"

Ramesses shook his head and paused a moment, his breathing quick, as if he was reliving the attack. Caesar continued stroking the back of his neck, feeling tension in him that a mere caress couldn't soothe.

"I dragged him onto the ship, but it was too late. He died while I flew for help."

"Who attacked you?" Alexander asked. "Elken spies?"

"No." Ramesses shrugged off Caesar's stroking hand and stood. Naked, his hands balled into fists, he paced in front of them. "They were Capriethe."

"What?" Both Caesar and Alexander spoke together. Alexander's eyes mirrored Caesar's shock.

"You heard me," Ramesses said, his blue eyes brilliant with fury. "They were our own kind. That's why I'm not so quick to return to them."

"We need to contact Khan and Napoleon," Alexander said. He picked up his communicator from the pile of clothes near his head and stood.

While he sent a message to their guardians, Caesar continued speaking to Ramesses. "I know they weren't representing all the Capriethe. They must have been from a small faction of traitors. Our people want to survive. They're awaiting our return."

"Like I said. It's been a long time since we've been home," Ramesses warned. "I'm sure things have changed."

"Vladimir was killed years ago, closer to the beginning of the war. It's over now."

"But that faction must still exist," Ramesses said.

"He's right," Alexander stated, switching off his communicator. "We need to proceed with caution. I've reached Khan. He hasn't noticed any odd behavior at the temple, but they've only been there a short time. He agrees the traitors must still exist. I told him not to do anything until we arrive. I have a plan to flush them out."

"What plan?" Caesar asked.

"Tell me this plan doesn't include baiting them," Ramesses said.

Alexander's brow furrowed. "Are you some kind of mind reader or just a very good strategist?"

"Maybe you're just predictable," Ramesses told him.

Alexander cast him an annoyed look and said, "Khan and Napoleon wanted to take care of it themselves, but we don't have time to wait for that. If the faction exists there's only one sure way to draw them out fast."

"The Billietri," Caesar said. "And I agree, this is our fight, not Khan and Napoleon's."

"I said once the Billietri return home, we're never leaving again," Alexander said.

"The question is, will the Billietri be returning?" Caesar held Ramesses' gaze. "Or will the trio be broken?"

Alexander also stared at the eldest of their group. After a moment of silence he said, "I know what you told us wasn't easy for you, Ramesses."

"I've never spoken of it to anyone until now," Ramesses stated, his jaw tight.

"But you told us," Caesar said. "That proves you still have some loyalty toward us. Some feeling."

"I said it before, Ramesses, and I'll say it again. You're Billietri. None of us chose it, but it's what we are," Alexander said.

"Yes." Ramesses nodded. "It's what we are. Inside I've always known that. I guess I was hoping I could deny our bond. I didn't fully believe Vladimir when he told me how strong the Billietri's connection is, but now that we're together -- Fuck. I'm not used to this kind of emotional shit."

Alexander and Caesar glanced at each other, smiles playing around their lips.

"I'm not exactly the mushy type either," Alexander said. "So I know where you're coming from."

"And I'll finally avenge Vladimir's death," Ramesses said. "He deserves that much."

Alexander held out his hand to Ramesses who gripped it firmly. Caesar rested his hand over both of theirs, then they parted, dressed and headed for their ships.

Chapter Four

It was close to midnight when the Billietri's ships landed in the private docking bay at the Temple of the Horned God.

There temple guards took custody of the Jodyian slavers. A high priest -- a tall, chestnut-haired buck of late middle years dressed in the traditional gold jacket and black trousers of the Horned God's followers -- greeted the Billietri. He escorted them to Khan and Napoleon's chamber where their guardians awaited them.

After dismissing the priest, Napoleon and Khan stared hard at the Billietri.

"You should not have come here until we discovered whether or not the faction of traitors still exists," Napoleon said.

"That might take another thirty years," Ramesses muttered, earning sharp looks from his elders.

"The fastest way to find them is to lure them out of hiding by giving them exactly what they want," Alexander stated.

Khan's eyes blazed. "You realize if you're killed all our sacrifices, including Vladimir's death, were wasted."

"We're grateful for what you've done," Caesar said, his voice calm but his expression immovable. "But we are the Billietri. If we run and hide much longer, we run the risk of destroying our own species. It's time we stood our ground and let our enemies know the Billietri will fight for what's ours and the Capriethe will survive."

"He's right," Ramesses said. "It's long past time we take our place and let these bastards know we mean business."

Alexander shook his head, a slight smile on his lips. "And you're the one who didn't want to come home."

"Now that I'm here I'll be damned if anybody is going to chase me off my turf,"
Ramesses said.

Napoleon and Khan exchanged glances.

"They're grown men," Napoleon stated. "And they're right."

Nodding, Khan said, "If that's how it is, then tell us what we can do to help."

* * *

After finalizing their plans with Napoleon and Khan, the Billietri were shown to their chamber.

Spacious with stone floors, tall windows and a heated indoor pool, it was the finest chamber in the temple. It was always occupied by the current generation of Billietri until the next generation came of age and took their place.

Entering the chamber, Ramesses felt an almost overwhelming wave of emotions crash over him. As a child he had spent many happy hours in this chamber. Khan, Napoleon and Vladimir had taught him how to swim in this very pool. At the table on the balcony, they had given him lessons from the sacred book and when he was very young, they allowed him sanctuary from dreaded thunderstorms. Alexander and Caesar sometimes joined them, though they were too young for swimming or reading.

The room was just as he remembered it, with an enormous bed covered in a thick brown quilt and green curtains on the tall, rectangular windows. A kidney-shaped pool took up half the room. Marble statues of graceful does and handsome bucks surrounded the pool and the full moon shone through the skylight above it.

He inhaled deeply, relishing the aroma of incense he hadn't enjoyed since before Vladimir's death.

"Ramesses," Caesar asked, gazing at him with gentle gray eyes. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah." He smiled slightly, cupped the back of Caesar's head and kissed him. "I'm fine. Just -- some memories, that's all."

"Good ones, I hope?"

"Real good."

Alexander walked to a long oak dresser and glanced at a silver tray holding glass jars and vials of various shapes and colors. He raised an eyebrow, the faintest smile touching his lips. "Massage oil. Lube. Cologne."

Grasping Caesar's hand, Ramesses tugged him toward the dresser and examined the containers.

"Can't wait to try this stuff out," Ramesses said.

"We can't until Mate Night." Caesar withdrew from his grasp, but couldn't resist tossing him a flirtatious look. "It's only a couple of days away. Until then we really need to save it."

"We've already done it. Why torture ourselves for a couple of days when we can take the edge of right now?" Ramesses grasped Caesar's lean waist and pulled him so close their pelvises ground together. He covered the blond's mouth with a searing kiss.

By the way Caesar responded with lips and tongue, his hands slipping around Ramesses and holding him tightly, he was aroused as well. Still when the kiss broke, he said, "Mate Night."

"He's right," Alexander said. "As much as I'd love to do you guys again, we need to make sure we're well rested for Mate Night."

Ramesses curled his lip. "It's rut. We're not going to run out of steam until after mating season."

"No, Ramesses," Caesar said firmly.

"Patience," Alexander stated.

"It's not one of my virtues," Ramesses muttered, but dropped his hold on Caesar's waist.

"I don't know about you guys, but I'm ready for a swim," Alexander said.

They undressed and waded into the warm water. Caesar looped his arms around Alexander's neck. Their hard chests pressed together and Alexander wrapped his arms around Caesar's lean waist.

Just looking at the two of them together turned Ramesses on, but he kept a rein on his desire. His mates were right about them needing to get some sleep because

they'd be up early tomorrow, busy with tribal affairs. The thought of it made him feel rather unsettled. As a boy he'd been certain of his duty. Then Vladimir died and he'd spent years struggling just to survive. He'd abandoned the lessons he'd been taught and often turned to a life of crime. Was he the right kind of man to become a father of his people? Probably not. But he was part of the Billietri, regardless of the life he'd led up until now. From here on out he must try to be someone his mates and his people could be proud of.

"Do you think they'll attack tonight?" Caesar whispered against Alexander's lips.

"I'm not sure, though we know they'll make an attempt over the next two days. They'll want to kill us before Mate Night, though there's a slim chance of all three of us giving seed to the next generation of Billietri this year. It's never happened before that all three Billietri are born in the same year, but our enemies won't take the risk. They'll want us dead before we attempt to procreate for the first time."

"I still can't figure out why any Capriethe would want to destroy his own species," Caesar said.

Ramesses ducked under water and swam toward them. He rose beside his mates and said, "Greed. Lots of people care only about themselves. They don't give a fuck about future generations. Only what they can get here and now."

"Lots of people?" Caesar raised a slender blond eyebrow. "Maybe *some* people."

"More than you think. Most people are scum," Ramesses stated.

"That's a very cynical attitude," Caesar said, brushing droplets of water from Ramesses' eyebrows. "I think if given the chance most people will do the right thing."

Ramesses snorted. "I might be cynical, but you're naïve."

"Then I guess I'll have to be the voice of reason," Alexander stated. "And it's reasonable to say that all it takes is a handful of well trained, determined traitors to bring us down if we're not careful."

"Agreed," Ramesses said.

That night the Billietri slept with their doors and windows unlocked, an invitation for evil. While two slept, the third hid, awaiting attack. Every few hours they changed guard.

No one approached them that night and in the morning they greeted their people for the first time.

In the great hall of the temple, they smiled and waved to the crowd that had gathered. Then brief speeches were made. A select group of reporters were allowed inside to broadcast the event to the entire population of Deerworld Six.

Afterward, there was a feast with the heads of the three Capriethe tribes and a long discussion about the future of their people.

That evening, the Billietri escaped to their chamber, tired but eager to put their plans for the Capriethe into action. The heads of the three tribes seemed happy for their return and enthusiastic about rebuilding their world with the Billietri.

"We have a long way to go, but I'm looking forward to all the work along the way," Caesar said from where he stood by the balcony. A warm breeze drifted through the open doors, lifting his hair and silky beard.

"So am I," Alexander said, removing his shirt and tossing it onto the bed. He approached Caesar and stood beside him. They glanced at each other and Alexander added, "I'm a little anxious, though. Tomorrow is Mate Night and so far --"

"Maybe they won't attack," Caesar said. "Perhaps they think we'll suspect something."

"We just need to watch our asses." Ramesses strode to his mates and grasped a handful of their bottom cheeks. "And I'll be happy to watch yours."

Alexander clutched Ramesses' short hair and covered his mouth with a rough kiss. Ramesses' tongue plunged between his lips and Alexander's tongue fenced with it.

"Save it for tomorrow night." Caesar pushed them apart. In spite of his sensible words, lust glowed in his eyes. "I can't wait for another good fuck, either, but tomorrow --"

"I know. I know. On Mate Night we'll finally be sated." Ramesses raised his eyes to the heavens. "Why do I doubt that? I don't think I've ever been fully satisfied during rut."

"That was before us," Alexander said.

"Not to mention the dozens of does we'll be having," Caesar reminded him.

As if on cue Napoleon and Khan knocked on the chamber door and stepped in.

"We brought the files you asked for on the does you'll be mating with tomorrow night," Napoleon said, placing his handheld computer on the breakfast table.

Alexander's brow furrowed. "We asked for files?"

"I did," Caesar told him, sitting at the table and focusing his attention on the computer.

"The does selected are all in top health," Napoleon said. "The high priest chose them personally, and Khan and I double checked them. The does and their husbands have all been thoroughly checked out and will provide your kids with loving homes."

"And proper education," Khan added.

"Of course should any doe give birth to Billietri, the kid will come to live with us at the temple and you will be asked to mate with her again, if she and her husband want a kid of their own to raise. There are a few single does, but they're comfortable financially and well able to care for kids."

"What do they look like?" Ramesses glanced over Caesar's shoulder.

"Not that it matters." Caesar cast him a chastising look.

"No. Doesn't matter," Ramesses said and exchanged a teasing look with Alexander.

"I wish we had arrived here sooner," Caesar sighed. "It would have been nice to interview them personally."

"I'm sure the high priest made excellent choices," Alexander said. "Damn. Are those really her measurements?" He pointed at the monitor which showed a picture of an attractive black-haired doe with an hourglass figure.

"Sorry, Alexander. She's from my tribe," Caesar said. He continued shifting through file after file of does and his brow furrowed. "I really would have liked to talk to them before we... you know."

Khan gave a throaty chuckle. "Believe me, boy, tomorrow night you won't be thinking about talking. Only fucking."

Ramesses didn't doubt it. Already the mating drive was so strong that he had to force himself to keep his thoughts focused on anything but the twitch in his cock.

Someone tapped on the door and Napoleon answered it. A priest-in-training stepped inside carrying a tray set for tea. He placed it on the table.

"Thank you. We can serve ourselves," Caesar told him.

The young buck nodded and left the chamber.

Alexander began pouring the tea and passing around the cups.

A sweet, odd aroma touched Ramesses' nose and his brow furrowed. There was something so familiar about that scent, but he just couldn't place...

He slapped Caesar's teacup out of his hand before he could take a sip. "Nobody drink that!"

"What the hell is your problem?" Alexander demanded.

"Shut up and watch," Ramesses said, taking a cup of tea and pouring it on a flowering plant on the edge of the balcony.

"So you want to drown our plants in tea?" Caesar wrinkled his nose. "I don't get..." His voices faded as the plant began to shrivel and die before their eyes.

"Poison," Ramesses stated. "It's rare. Native to a planet called Ophelia in the Tyarra-Set galaxy."

Khan stared at him in surprise. "How did you --"

"I could smell it. I spent some time with --" Ramesses paused a moment and shook his head. Sighing, he continued, "I spent some time with a group of Ophelian assassins. They used the poison because it's untraceable. However it has a very distinct scent until it's ingested, then the scent disappears."

“I won’t even ask what you were doing with Ophelian assassins,” Caesar said. “I’m just glad you could detect the poison.”

Alexander and Khan wasted no time before notifying the high priest and temple security. The entire temple and the surrounding area were locked down. Everyone was to be rounded up for questioning.

Just as suspected, the traitors had attempted to destroy the Billietri before their first Mate Night.

* * *

Within hours of the search, temple guards arrested the man responsible for poisoning the tea. He had posed as servant, worked in the temple for several years and recently been promoted to the kitchen. It seemed these assassins had spent much time planning the deaths of the Billietri.

While Ramesses, Alexander and Khan joined the guards in questioning the prisoner, Caesar and Napoleon briefly addressed the public, reassuring them that the security problem had been rectified and Mate Night would proceed as planned.

In spite of his almost admirable stubbornness, the prisoner finally succumbed to questioning. According to his statements, a small group of Capriethe assassins had been well paid by a secret faction of Elken who refused to accept the end of the war and the treaty with the Capriethe.

Nearing the early hours of the morning, Khan and Napoleon suggested the Billietri leave their guardians and the tribal leaders to deal with the prisoner and the Elken until after Mate Night.

Reluctantly, the Billietri retired to their chamber, undressed and climbed into bed.

“How the hell are we supposed to sleep with all the shit going on around here?” Ramesses scowled, punching a pillow before dropping his head onto it.

Caesar lay beside him, draping a leg over him and resting his head against his shoulder. “Just clear your mind and relax.”

Ramesses and Alexander glanced at each other and raised their eyes to the heavens.

"Aside from nearly being assassinated, I have a hard-on longer than the horns on my head," Alexander muttered. Sighing, he stretched out on his back beside Caesar and shook his head. "This isn't going to work. I can't sleep when I'm this horny."

"We need to save it all for tonight," Caesar, the annoying voice of reason, stated calmly. "When we wake up we'll be satiating our lust from sunset to sunrise. Literally. Can't you guys wait until then?"

"Just one little --" Ramesses began, curling his fist around his cock and pumping.

"No!" Caesar clamped a hand over Ramesses' who groaned with pleasure.

"Don't tease me, Caesar. I can't take it right now. And don't try to pretend you're not just as turned-on. Your scent is stronger than mine and Alexander's put together."

"That's true." Alexander drew a deep breath, closing his eyes, as if savoring the aroma of his mates. "Actually you both smell pretty damn tasty." He ran a hand down Caesar's back and squeezed his buttocks. He pressed a teasing finger between the indentation of his firm ass cheeks and Caesar jerked, his cock growing even stiffer where it pressed against Ramesses' hip.

"Stop it!" Caesar snapped.

"He raised his voice." Alexander grinned. "Losing control, Caesar?"

"No, are you?" Caesar turned to the redhead with an almost wicked grin, grasped his balls and kneaded.

Alexander's broad chest expanded and his eyes gleamed with pleasure. Rolling toward Caesar, he covered the slender blond's body with his own and growled against his lips, "Just a quickie to take the edge off."

"No." Caesar pushed him off. "Both of you go to sleep or we'll have to lie in separate beds."

"Bullshit," Ramesses snorted. "This is my bed and I ain't moving. Neither are you two. You're the ones who talked me into coming here and part of the deal was I sleep with my mates. Get it?"

"Got it," Caesar smiled.

"Great," Alexander muttered. He closed his eyes. "I'll try to sleep, but I can't wait until tonight." It seemed a lifetime of building up patience had finally caught up with him. Alexander had never been patient and he rarely curbed his sexual appetite, so this waiting for Mate Night business had him frustrated beyond belief.

"Waiting makes it even better," Caesar murmured, closing his eyes and once again settling his head onto Ramesses' shoulder.

"Is that true?" Ramesses asked skeptically.

"I suppose we'll find out," replied the blond.

Ramesses also closed his eyes, though it was a long time before he slept. His thoughts raced and his cock ached. Both made resting nearly impossible. Finally he succumbed and drifted into an unexpectedly comfortable sleep, wrapped in the scent and security of his mates.

Chapter Five

It was dusk when Caesar awoke. A feeling of excitement darted through him and he couldn't resist smiling. Mate Night.

Tonight he, Alexander and Ramesses would make passionate love to each other. The seemingly insatiable drive enflamed by their lust would then be carried to three special chambers below the palace where the selected does from each tribe waited for the Billietri to get them with kids.

Though Caesar strongly preferred fucking Alexander and Ramesses, he looked forward to making love with the does and fathering the next generation of Capriethe. Their people were desperate for children, as it had been twenty-nine years since the last kids were born to any of the tribes.

In several months, the Billietri would have many blood sons and daughters. Eventually they would have their own bucks to raise when the next generation of Billietri were born.

Caesar rose from the bed quietly, trying not to disturb Ramesses and Alexander, but they were already awake.

"I can hardly wait to get started," Alexander said, running his hand through Caesar's hair.

"Neither can I." Ramesses stretched, his sleek muscles tightening. Caesar couldn't resist touching him.

He ran a hand down the length of Ramesses' muscle-ridged belly, watching it jerk beneath his touch.

"Ticklish are you?" Caesar smiled.

"Why, are you?" Ramesses offered a crooked grin and tickled Caesar's ribs.

The blond laughed and knocked his hands away, but Alexander grasped him, wrapping his arms and legs around Caesar, leaving his belly exposed to Ramesses' devilish fingertips.

Jerking and laughing hard, Caesar finally wrapped his powerful legs around Ramesses, catching him in a grapple hold.

Chuckling, the men released each other and stood.

After brushing their teeth, they went for a refreshing dip in the pool. They'd nearly finished when three priests arrived to prepare them for Mate Night.

The priests spread thick, soft towels on the marble benches by the pool and beckoned the Billietri to stretch out on their stomachs. Then the priests massaged them with a scented oil that warmed and stimulated their already aroused bodies even more. By the time the massage ended, all three were ready to fuck each other into oblivion.

"We will return in an hour to escort you to the does," said one of the priests. He and his brothers bowed and left the Billietri to their carnal business.

"This is it." Ramesses smiled, rising from the bench, his eyes brilliant with desire.

They reached for each other in a tangle of hands and horns, searching tongues and throbbing cocks.

"Bed," Alexander grunted, grasping his mates by the asses and pushing them toward their destination.

Caesar made a short detour to move the silver tray with the lube and oils from the dresser to the night table. He coated his hands in lube then passed the container to Ramesses. When Alexander reached for it, Ramesses placed it aside and smiled. "Not yet. Caesar and I have plans for you. Right?"

Caesar glanced at Ramesses who winked, a playful, passionate gleam in his eyes.

"Yes, but you're next," Caesar told him.

Ramesses shrugged and his grin broadened. "I've got no problem with that."

Resting a hand lightly on Alexander's throat, Ramesses bent and kissed him. At the same time, Caesar grasped Alexander's cock in his slick hand and stroked, feeling the staff thicken against his palm. He settled between Alexander's long, steely legs and

took the crown of his erection into his mouth, sucking and rolling his tongue over it. He paid careful attention to the vein running along the underside, flicking his tongue over and over until Alexander writhed, his buttocks tightening and releasing with pleasure.

Ramesses' kisses stifled Alexander's moans, but when the eldest Billietri finally pulled away, the redhead grasped and groaned. Those sexy sounds and the feel of Alexander's thick cock against his tongue stoked Caesar's passion. He could scarcely wait to fill Alexander's tight ass with his cock.

After giving the redhead's cock one last suck, Caesar lifted his head and stared intently into Alexander's green eyes. "Turn over. I want your ass."

Alexander grinned and Ramesses gave a snort of laughter.

"What happened to our gentle, reasonable mate?" Ramesses asked.

"It's Mate Night," Caesar replied. He sat up, grasped the back of Ramesses neck and kissed him, thrusting his tongue deeply into his mouth.

"Mmm," Ramesses moaned, responding with enthusiasm. His hand slipped between their bodies and curled around Caesar's stiff cock. He stroked until Caesar thought he might explode. Gasping, he pushed Ramesses away and turned back to Alexander.

"Turn over," Caesar ordered.

Rebellion shone in Alexander's eyes. With his military upbringing, he wasn't accustomed to being anyone's bitch. If the strong scent of his musk and the lust in his eyes was any indication, in spite of the battle with his dominant instincts, he couldn't help being turned on.

"I'd really like to fuck you," Caesar said in a slightly softer tone. Again he bent and ran his tongue along the steely length of Alexander's cock.

"When you put it that way..." Alexander muttered and turned onto his stomach.

Ramesses lubed Alexander's ass while Caesar coated his cock with the slippery substance.

His heart pumping with excitement, Caesar mounted Alexander from behind, slowly filling his gorgeous ass with his shaft. Alexander moaned, his fists tight on the mattress.

Damn, Caesar had never been this turned on in his life. He thought the first time making love with his mates had been fantastic, but this was even better.

Glancing at Ramesses, he saw the dark-haired buck staring at them with raw lust, the black pupils nearly filling his vibrant blue eyes. His cock snug in his hand, he pumped in time with Caesar's thrusting.

Caesar ran his hands over Alexander's sweat-slicked back, loving the ripple of muscles beneath smooth, damp skin. He tried to keep a firm hold on his desire, but was too aroused. Within moments he came so long and hard that the room seemed to spin around him. Panting, he pulled out and flopped onto his back.

In spite of the intense orgasm, a moment later he was pole hard again.

He felt a hot, wet mouth on his cock head and opened his eyes to see Alexander sucking and licking him with a vengeance. The sensations coursing through him were almost unbearable. Just when he thought for sure he was about to shoot into Alexander's mouth, the redhead released him and rolled him roughly onto his stomach.

Alexander grasped him by the ankles and dragged him toward the end of the bed, giving Ramesses space to kneel by his head. Grasping Caesar's wrists, Ramesses pinned them to the mattress while Alexander lubed his ass and pumped into it.

This was too fucking hot. Caesar writhed as best he could with Alexander's powerful body pumping into him and Ramesses' strong hands holding him immobile.

Alexander lasted a surprisingly long time, thrusting and grunting with pleasure while intermittently licking and caressing Caesar's neck, shoulders and back. Caesar's pulse raced and his body turned to flame. He knew he was crying out but wasn't exactly sure what he was saying since he was too lost in sensation.

"Caesar, ah, fuck!" Alexander shouted and came. His ecstatic release drove Caesar over the edge again and he spurted, his cock trapped almost painfully against the mattress.

Alexander collapsed atop him, his warm breath fanning Caesar's sweaty neck. Somewhere in the midst of the mind-numbing aftermath, Caesar realized he still wasn't sated.

This was unbelievable. He'd experienced rut many times before, but the more he and his mates made love, the stronger their drive became. It was a scientific fact that the Billietri, after making love with each other, released a chemical that empowered them with the ability to make love for hours on end. Caesar hadn't fully believed it until now. Tonight, the last night of rut, their drives were even stronger than when they'd made love a few days ago.

"Hey, I think I've been very patient here," Ramesses said, breaking into his thoughts.

Both Caesar and Alexander lifted their heads to Ramesses who knelt, stroking his thick erection.

"I think so." Caesar grinned and pushed Alexander off him.

Ramesses grasped Alexander's hips, forcing him onto all fours. This time Alexander didn't hesitate for a second, but allowed Ramesses to claim him from behind.

Caesar couldn't resist the sight of his two powerful, sexy mates together. He knelt behind Ramesses, squeezing and stroking his big, tight ass, then he entered him, savoring every heart-pounding moment.

For an hour the Billietri took each other, over and over. By then males of most other species would have passed out from excess, but the Billietri were more aroused than ever.

Drenched in sweat, their cocks still as hard as the huge, curved horns on their heads, they finally broke for a quick dip in the pool. Moments later, the three priests returned.

"This is it," Alexander said, glancing at his mates as they dried off and slipped into long, black robes held by the priests. "Good luck."

"I think I'll only feel lucky when the swelling finally goes down," Caesar murmured, glancing at his stiff cock poking against the thin fabric of the robe.

“See you at dawn.” Ramesses winked at his mates before they followed the priests out of the chamber.

* * *

In spite of how relentlessly the Billietri had fucked each other, Alexander was more aroused than ever. The chemical given off during their lovemaking session had excited them to unimaginable heights. This last night of rut had always been the most intense, but the Billietri had never before had each other to stimulate them to this almost unbearable level.

Though he walked slowly and proudly beside the priest on the way to the chamber where does from his tribe waited, Alexander’s heart raced and his cock ached with passion.

The priest paused outside the thick oak door leading to the chamber. He opened it and stepped inside, clapping his hands to silence the chatting does.

“Mothers of the Capriethe, it is a night of great honor. I present Alexander of the Billietri,” said the priest, then stepped aside, his head bowed as Alexander strode into the large chamber carpeted in black. Enormous velvet and satin pillows were strewn about the room. The does, some dark skinned, some light, some slender, others plump, but all kneeling in respect to the Billietri, stared at him with lust and wonder.

“Welcome, Alexander. Hail the Billietri,” the does replied in unison.

The priest nodded again and said, “Refreshments have been provided on the table in the back of the room. I won’t bother you unless you summon me.”

Alexander nodded, his heart thrumming wildly.

He couldn’t keep the smile from his face as he walked amidst the does who reached for him, their soft hands sweeping his steely body, their delicious scents filling him with every breath.

When this was over, he’d have much to talk about with Caesar and Ramesses.

That was his last coherent thought before he lost himself in an ocean of perfumed flesh and soft, firm curves.

* * *

Sunlight shone through the tall, narrow windows lining the corridor leading to the Billietri's chamber. It was a gorgeous day, but Caesar was too tired to enjoy it. He yawned and blinked his bleary eyes as he slowly put one tired foot in front of the other. Never in his life had he felt so completely sated. Not even the most intense training with his martial arts masters had left him as sore as Mate Night.

He'd made love with dozens of does several times over, only pausing when overcome by hunger and thirst. Though he had found physical pleasure in the females, he wanted nothing more than to curl up with Alexander and Ramesses and sleep. In the back of his mind, he thought about the assassins and the renewed trouble with the Elken.

Stepping into the chamber, he found Alexander and Ramesses already sprawled on the bed looking as tired and satisfied as he felt.

"Hey." Alexander nudged Ramesses. "He's back."

Ramesses opened his beautiful blue eyes, the flesh beneath bruised with exhaustion, and glanced at Caesar who collapsed beside him on the bed.

"I never thought I'd say this, but I'm sexed out," Ramesses murmured.

"Me too," Caesar admitted. He slowly unbelted his robe, but it took several moments before he garnered the energy to sit up, remove it and toss it aside.

"Any word from our guardians?" Caesar asked.

"Khan said he and the tribal leaders contacted the Elken government. They swear they knew nothing about the assassins or the faction who hired them."

"Yeah. Right," Ramesses said sarcastically.

"That's what I say." Alexander yawned. "They claim the faction is a vigilante group. Unless we want to start the war all over again, we'll have to accept what they say. At least until they give us reason to believe otherwise."

"You mean wait until they try to kill us again," Ramesses said.

"Or they could be telling the truth," Caesar suggested, but at the sharp looks from his mates, added, "Though we need to keep an eye on them. It's going to take

some time before life returns to normal, both for the Capriethe and the Elken. If we want this world to survive, we need to try everything possible to keep the treaty."

"I agree," Ramesses said. "Providing the Elken prove they want to keep the peace as much as we do."

"No one said this was going to be easy," Alexander stated.

"I love a good challenge," Caesar replied, unable to disguise the sleepiness in his voice. It was almost impossible to keep his eyes open.

"No matter what happens, there's no place I'd rather be than here with the two of you," Ramesses said quietly.

This woke Caesar up a bit. He and Alexander lifted their heads and stared at the eldest of the Billietri. Caesar hadn't expected such an emotional overture so soon from Ramesses. It was good knowing one of his mates felt as deeply for him as Caesar did for them.

"I feel the same way," Alexander added, running a hand from Caesar's chest to Ramesses'.

"So do I," Caesar said. In truth, part of him already loved his mates, but he realized they were the kind of men who needed time to adjust to a relationship before expressing tenderness, at least verbally.

"Goodnight, guys," Ramesses murmured.

"You mean good morning," Caesar said.

With a soft grunt of contentment, Alexander draped his leg over Ramesses, his foot resting against Caesar's calf.

Warmed and soothed by the presence of his mates, Caesar closed his eyes and let sleep claim him.

Epilogue

Ten Months Later

Ramesses and Alexander sat on the balcony in their chamber, enjoying the clear, sunny afternoon and looking at holographic pics of their offspring. Over the past week the Billietri had separated to visit their tribes and the children they had sired.

Caesar would be arriving soon. Alexander and Ramesses were eager to see his get and proudly display pics of their own.

Glancing across the table at Ramesses, Alexander noted the short nubs of his newly growing horns. Like all bucks, they would grow slowly throughout the year and by next Mate Night they'd be long and impressively curved.

Alexander ran a hand over one of his own nubs. While enormous horns made a buck feel powerful, it was nice to be relieved of their weight for a few months.

The door opened and Caesar stepped in, wearing the gold shirt and black trousers the Billietri had adopted since returning to the temple. Though his face wore its normal serene expression, his eyes shone with happiness and pride.

"Welcome home," Ramesses said.

"Hello." Caesar approached and joined them at the table. "How were your trips?"

"Excellent," Alexander said. He hit a key on his handheld computer and pulled up a holographic pic of four chubby redheaded babies. "Look at that. Two sets of twins."

"Congratulations," Caesar said. "I see they got your coloring."

"That's good, but look at these." Ramesses displayed a pic of three boys with large blue eyes. "Triplets."

"How about you, Caesar? Got any pics?" Alexander asked.

"A few." Caesar pulled out his handheld computer, hit several keys and dozens of holographic pics floated around the balcony.

"Nice," Ramesses said as he and Alexander admired Caesar's offspring.

"I've got thirty-six girls and eighteen boys," Alexander boasted.

"I have twenty-three girls and thirty boys," Ramesses told them, pulling up more pics.

"I'm looking forward to next year," Alexander said.

Caesar grinned. "I'm still recovering from this year. By the way, how long do we have before our meeting with the high priest?"

"An hour," Alexander replied.

Ramesses wiggled his eyebrows. "Long enough for some, uh, exercise."

Entwining his fingers in Ramesses' hair, Caesar kissed him deeply. When the kiss broke, Caesar scrubbed a hand over Ramesses' goatee that had grown nearly as long as those of his companions.

Alexander stood and removed his shirt, tossing it aside and baring his powerful torso. "Let's make love in the pool."

"Sounds good to me," Caesar said, and curled his fingers in the thick mat of red hair covering Alexander's broad chest.

The Billietri undressed and waded into the pool. In the warm water they splashed, kissed and caressed each other's slick bodies.

Affairs of state would come soon enough. For now they relished each other's company -- the love and lust shared by the Billietri.

Kate Hill

What do trips around the world, endless nights of breathtaking sex, and a muscular, 6-foot 3-inch, brown-haired, blue-eyed significant other have to do with Kate Hill? Absolutely nothing, but she can dream, can't she? In reality Kate is a single, thirty-something vegetarian New Englander who loves writing romantic fantasies. Visit her online at <http://www.kate-hill.com>, www.myspace.com/katehillromance, or join her newsgroup at groups.yahoo.com/group/katehill. Stop by Kate's Amazon blog at www.amazon.com.